

JUST THE FACTS: Resilience

Optimism

Developing Optimism

Optimism is a set of beliefs that helps to focus your attention and behavior on the opportunities and possibilities of life. Optimism is not a rose-colored lens, but a clear lens, without distortion, that allows you to see life realistically and clearly. **Being realistic is to be optimistic.** Optimism allows you to see that opportunities exist even when you are confronted by challenges and changes in your life. Pessimism on the other hand, is an internal stressor which creates a sense of threat around the stressors in life. The challenge associated with moving to a more optimistic world view has to do with practicing new beliefs and new behaviors which are then reflected in the choices you make in your everyday life. Where the pessimist sees problems, the optimist sees opportunities.

Both optimism and pessimism influence your resilience in terms of your health, behavior, happiness, success, and thinking. Optimism has been associated with long-term health and resistance to disease in many research studies. Optimism is not to be confused with unrealistic optimism, which is related to denial.

Optimism vs. Pessimism

and ability.

In the dangerous world of the combat environment, it may seem that pessimistic beliefs are realistic. But if you compare them to optimistic beliefs, you will see that the capacity to cope and even thrive in the presence of challenges and stressors is better with optimistic assumptions. Carried outside the combat environment, the pessimistic world view is even more toxic.

| THE OPTIMIST'S WORLD VIEW | THE PESSIMIST'S WORLD VIEW |
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| All possibilities exist in the world. Every problem has a solution. If you don't look for it, you won't find it. Because of the belief that every problem has a solution, now and executive extrategies are often tried. | The possibilities tend to be weighted toward the negative. Pessimists are often worriers. The likelihood of success is constantly in doubt. Life is not fair but it should be. |
| solution, new and creative strategies are often tried.Success is expected. | There is very little that can be done to control events. |
| The world is neither fair nor unfair. It simply is. While truly bad things can happen, they tend not to happen in your personal world. On the occasion that they do, the experience is ultimately viewed as an opportunity to learn and grow. | Good outcomes are viewed as the result of luck. Bad things are likely to strike close to home no matter what efforts are made to prevent them from happening. |
| Optimistic beliefs will help create many more positive outcomes in life because they help you to interpret events realistically. Success is viewed as a result of effort, persistence, | |



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Change Your Lens: 6 Steps to Realistic Optimism

"Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in awhile, or the light won't come in." - Alan Alda

In the Army's Resilience Program, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, STEP 1: Focus on the Positive. this strategy for increasing resilience is called "Hunt for the Good Stuff." This is important for increasing resilience because we frequently focus our attention on what goes wrong, what could go wrong, or what almost went wrong. It's important to retrain our thinking and begin to focus on the experiences we have in life that work out well, even when they are not perfect. This also allows

you to increase the level of gratitude in your life, which is a characteristic of resilient people.

While we tend to think that "getting things off our chest" has **STEP 2:** Resist the Desire to Complain. value, the reality is that complaining usually makes you feel worse by keeping your attention on an unhappy situation. The idea that we are "pressure cookers" who need to let off steam has been discredited by psychological research. Complaining will distance you from positive people and attracts negative people who encourage anger, hostility and envy.

STEP 3: Decide for Yourself What Is and Isn't Possible. Be skeptical of limiting yourself to beliefs that say something can't be done. The statement, "that's impossible" or "that can't be done" has been made about every advancement in human history. Of course, not everything is possible. No one can fly to the moon by flapping their arms. There are many things that we dismiss too easily, however. This is about learning to "think outside the box."

STEP 4: Be For Things, Not Against Things. This is a critical piece of developing your optimistic approach to life. When you are against something, you are focused on creating less. Creating less requires attacking, punishing, complaining, and reacting. When you are for something, your focus is on creating more. Creating more is about new ideas, options, and productivity. Instead of saying "no" to pessimism, say "yes" to optimism.

STEP 5: Laugh At Yourself, but not at Others. "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." Humor opens us to possibilities. It reminds us that many of the solutions we thought were foolproof in the past weren't, or that many of the limitations we thought

were set in stone weren't. Our current point of view on any subject, therefore, shouldn't be held on to with a death grip. Even if we believe we have the perfect solution, our foibles of the past should remind us to keep an open mind. Think back to what you thought to be absolutely true ten years ago. Has any of that changed? Can you laugh at it now? Optimists don't use humor to hurt others. Avoid the pessimist's use of cynicism and sarcasm as a substitute for genuine humor. Remind yourself on a regular basis that you can increase your sense of accomplishment and well-being by your own efforts. Feeling good about yourself shouldn't require that you put others down, judge them, or compare them unfavorably to yourself.

STEP 6: Fake It Until You Make It. A short cut to changed behavior is to engage in the desired behavior even if it goes against how you would normally act. Practice new habits even if they feel awkward. Research is clear that one of the best strategies for

behavior change is to change behavior first, and let your feelings about it catch up. If you put off

change until you're comfortable with the idea, you may never change.